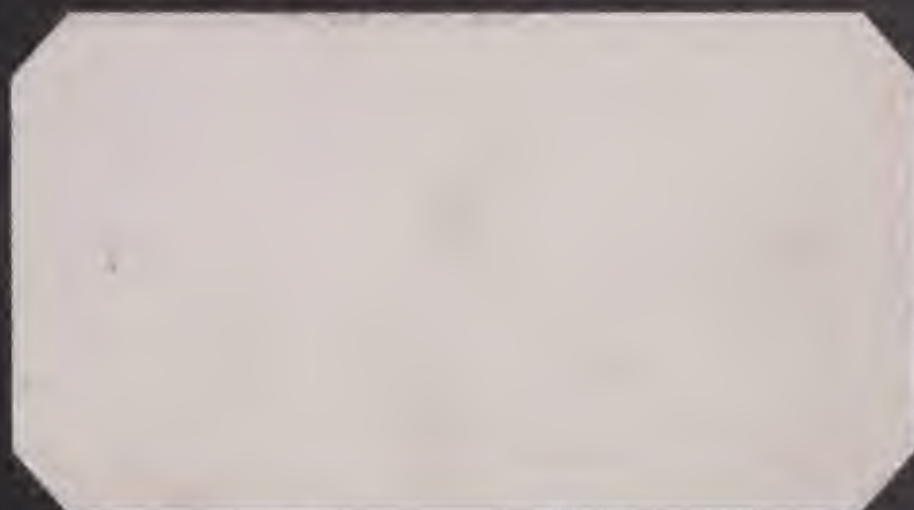


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CATALOGUE OF PLAYS  
WRITTEN BY THE PLAYWRIGHTS DIVISION  
OF  
THE ILLINOIS WRITERS' PROJECT  
of the  
WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION

• 1940



*Writers program, Illinois*

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U.S. HOUSE OF CONGRESS  
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DIVISION OF DOCUMENTS



PREFATORY NOTE

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In these days, when most dramatic works are prefaced with the assurance that "any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental" it is with a measure of relief that we are able to say that in a majority of these plays the leading characters were actual persons whose deeds contributed in some manner toward the building of the American Midwest.

The plays included in the present series are devoted chiefly to events and personalities of the past. Some of these events were highly controversial in their own day, but we are now able to look at them with the perspective given us by the passing years.

Because the playwrights whose works are included in this series have a great and boundless faith in Americanism and more especially in the drama of the building of midwest America, and because the Illinois Writers' Project has encouraged them in this faith, and because of their desire to record in dramatic form some of the phases of the growth of a nation, these plays have been written and compiled by the Playwright's Division of the Illinois Writers' Project.

Some liberties may have been taken with accurate historic fact, but not with the actual spirit of the times nor with the working forces which brought on the dramatic crises.

Scripts of these plays are available to tax-supported schools and non-profit organizations for presentation with the permission of the State Supervisor of the Illinois Writers' Project. Arrangements can be made for such permission by addressing the State Supervisor, Illinois Writers' Project, Work Projects Administration, 433 East Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois.



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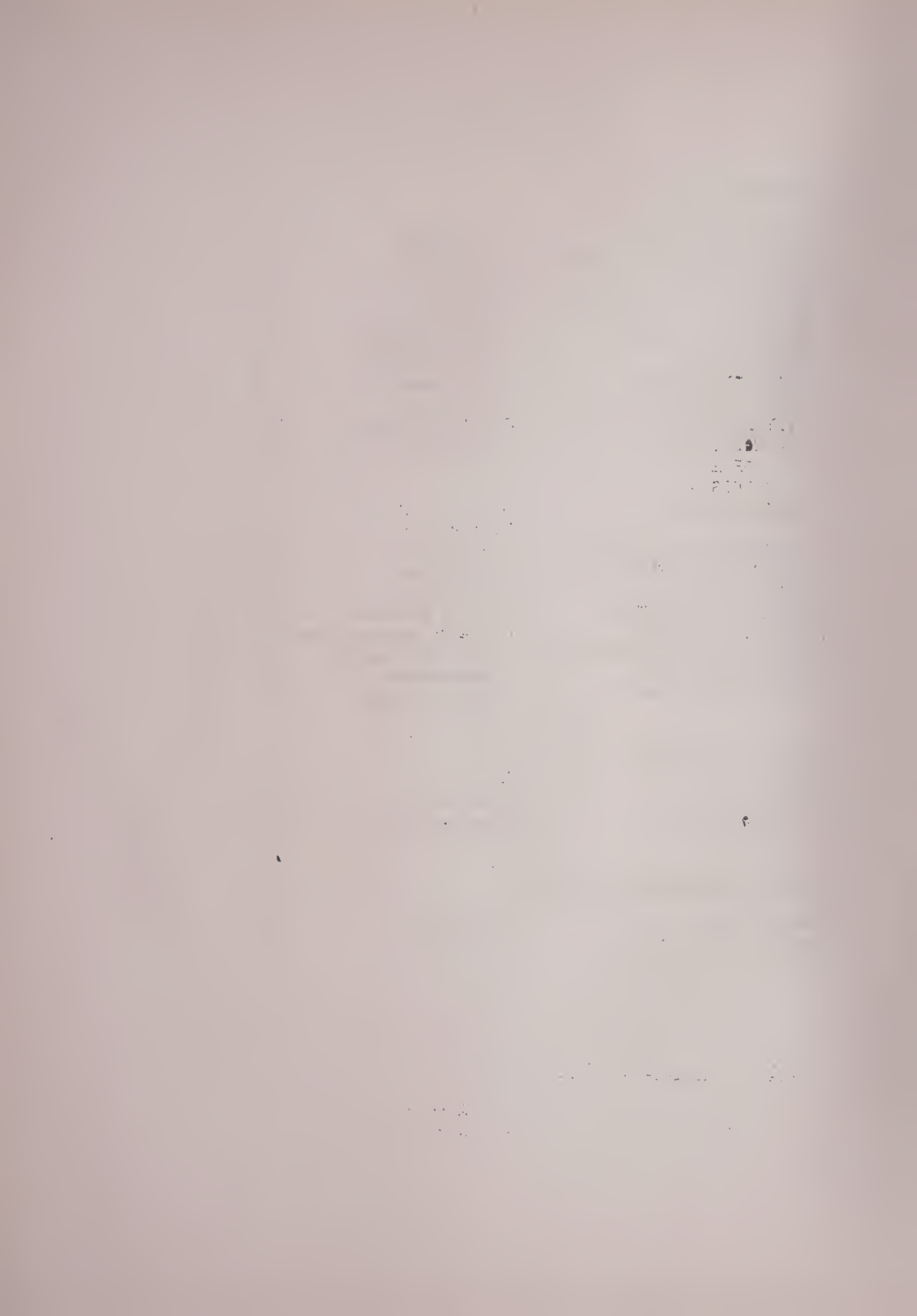
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## CAVALIER

A Three Act Play

By

Ruth Schaaf

TIME: The seventeenth century.

SCENE: Two interiors. One exterior.

CHARACTERS: Eighteen men, one child.

COSTUMES: Seventeenth century.

AUDIENCE: Universal.

SYNOPSIS: La Salle has convinced Frontenac, the Governor of Canada that the building of forts in the Mississippi Valley would be of great benefit to France. Frontenac promises to do all he can. But the foppish Count De Brucy, who is cousin to the King of France, hears the interview between the men and decides to accompany La Salle. In the wilderness the Count is a nuisance to La Salle for he superciliously insists on certain comforts. But to La Salle's surprise, when a crucial situation arises with the Indians, De Brucy volunteers to go off into the wilderness to summon La Salle's lieutenant, Tonty. Meanwhile La Salle's men mutiny and leave him. At the blackest hour of all, when the Iroquois are attacking, De Brucy arrives with Tonty and a substantial body of French troops. But a medicine man of the Illinois Indians, who has been jealous of La Salle's influence with the chief and who hates the whites, aims a shot at La Salle through the window of the fort, De Brucy sees him, throws himself in front of La Salle, and is killed saving the life of the French explorer.

### PRODUCTION NOTES:

Easy to stage. Could be played on a bare stage with a few props. The costumes need be little more than boots, a hat with a plume, a long jacket, trousers tucked into the boots.







# WHITE CAPTIVE

A One Act Play in Verse

By

Ruth Ellis

TIME: Summer, 1830.

SETTING: A log cabin interior.

CHARACTERS: Three women, six men, two children.

COSTUMES: Indian and frontier.

SYNOPSIS: Twenty years after a daughter of a white family had been captured by Indians, an agent, Colonel Blatz, offers to negotiate her return for half the family fortune. The Colonel brings the supposed captive daughter, Mimi, accompanied by Mimi's friend, Tyon, and Tyon's two children. The Colonel has no definite proof of Mimi's relationship to the family, but intends to foist her on them for the reward. However, the mother of the family recognizes similarities between Tyon's children and her own lost baby. Tyon, also a white captive meditates and bit by bit recalls her early life and family. Tyon and her family rejoice in their reunion; nevertheless Tyon leaves them to return to her Indian husband and his people.

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## COLONEL BIG KNIFE

A Play in One Act, Three Scenes

By

Lester Pine

TIME: Latter part Eighteenth century.

SCENE: Illinois country.

CHARAGTERS: Twenty-five men or more, one boy.

COSTUMES: Makeshift frontier.

AUDIENCE: High school or over.

SYNOPSIS: Colonel George Rogers Clark and his "Big Knives" are garrisoned at Kaskaskia. A settler named Johnson and his family are murdered by Indians sent out by British General Hamilton at Vincennes. Clark buries Johnson, who rode to the fort with his head cut open, when Senor Vigo informs Clark of the weakness of the British garrison, he decides to attack, effecting a surprise by marching across 200 miles of muddy prairie. Despite hunger, cold, sickness, grumbling, and open revolt, he manages to lead his force to the outskirts of Vincennes without losing a man. They surround the fort and shoot the sentries at the portholes. The British can not return the fire for they are picked off the moment they show their faces at an opening. Maisenville, an Indian partisan, is captured and tortured. Clark stops this and sends a note to Hamilton, warning him that murder will be done if he is obliged to storm. Hamilton replies that he will not be bluffed. Just as Clark is about to resume hostilities a white flag appears over the fort. Hamilton requests a parley. At the parley Hamilton blusters, fumes, and struts. Clark tells Hamilton that if he does not surrender at 10 o'clock the following morning the fort will be demolished and every man killed. This ends the parley. In the morning the drums start to roll. At the end of the roll hostilities will begin. A white flag appears over the fort showing that Clark is the better bluffer. The fort falls and Clark wins his victory for democracy.

NOTE: This is a very simple play to stage. Drapes and a few props are all that are necessary. Affords excellent acting opportunities to a great part of the cast.

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## WHITE FLOWER

A One Act Drama

By  
Charles Hayes

TIME: Afternoon, 1800.

SCENE: Indian lodge.

CHARACTERS: Six men, one boy, seven women, one girl.

COSTUMES: Indian frontier.

AUDIENCE: Universal.

SYNOPSIS: Red Eagle, a chief of the Potawatomi, and his mother, Old Queen, are in their lodge discussing White Flower, Red Eagle's adopted sister. White Flower, who is a white child, was kidnapped from a settler's cabin by Red Eagle several years ago. Flat Nose, Red Eagle's squaw, also present, has just finished a bead necklace. She presents the necklace to Red Eagle, hoping that he will allow her to keep it; instead, Red Eagle keeps the necklace for White Flower. This angers Flat Nose, who has long resented the child's place in Red Eagle's affections. White Flower and Running Deer, a playmate, enter, quarreling over a woodland incident. Red Eagle pacifies the children and plays games with them. Flat Nose is sent to get food for White Flower. Meantime, White Flower falls asleep. Red Eagle lays her on a blanket, then he and Old Queen go out. Flat Nose comes back with the food and roughly awakens White Flower. When the squaw leaves, Running Deer comes in and knocks the food out of White Flower's hand, and says that Flat Nose poisoned it. Red Eagle and Old Queen return, greatly excited. A party of whites is approaching the village. Old Queen and White Flower are sent to hide. Father Pierre, a missionary priest, Mr. and Mrs. Lytel, two white men, and Thundercloud, and old chief of the village, enter. Red Eagle denies that the child is in the village but the fraud is exposed by Flat Nose, and the child is taken away by her rightful parents.

### PRODUCTION

NOTES: Simple, easy to direct. Few props necessary.

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## THE LAST RIVER

A Three Act Drama

By  
Charles Hayes

TIME: 1790.

PLACE: Frontier.

SCENE: Five (three interiors, two exteriors).

COSTUME: Frontier, keelboatmen, soldiers.

AUDIENCE: Adults.

CHARACTERS: Twenty-two men, three women. (Extras: men and women)

SYNOPSIS: Mike Fink, a restless frontiersman, finds himself trapped by an influx of new settlers and decides to move on. He joins a keelboat crew and in time, because of his prowess as a fighter and riverman, becomes their uncrowned king. Then the steamboat appears on the Mississippi and threatens the keelboat trade. Lydia, a girl with whom Mike has been consorting for several years, is casting eyes at the glamorous steamboat captains. When Simpson, the owner of Mike's boat, buys a steamboat, Mike refuses its captaincy. While Mike is in St. Louis, debating his future, the Reverend Briggs, a fanatical minister from the old settlement, and Jeff Collins, Lydia's father, appear. Jeff forces Mike to marry Lydia at the point of a gun. Mike, Lydia, and Carpenter, a boy to whom Mike is greatly attached, join an expedition which is to build a fort at the headwaters of the Missouri River. After the fort is built Mike finds himself caught in the old dilemma, as once again newcomers swarm into the settlement, and restrictions are placed on Mike and men of his ilk. Just when things are at their lowest ebb, Mike discovers that Lydia and Carpenter are in love. Mike is arrested for violating a "No Shooting" order, and is confined in the fort. Prior to this, Mike and a number of old keelboatmen have planned to steal a keelboat and go on their own up the unexplored Yellowstone river. On the day of his trial, Mike escapes and joins his friends on their journey up the Yellowstone, much to the relief of Major Ashley, commandant of the fort.





LE AFFAIRE LA VOSSIERE

A Comedy in One Act

By  
Jacob Bentkover

TIME: Spring, 1788

PLACE: French settlement at Peoria, Illinois.

SET: One interior.

CHARACTERS: Seven men, three women.

SYNOPSIS: Louis La Vossiere discovers that Henriette, his young wife, is carrying on a flirtation with a trapper named Maillet. In a fit of jealousy he plans to kill all of his enemies, himself, and his wife. He plants a powder mine in the basement of his house and then invites his enemies to dinner, planning the explosion when they are all at the table. His messenger is Enipoo, an Indian, who despises Vossiere and wants to revenge himself on him for certain injustices. At the table, in the presence of the guests, Vossiere announces that they are all doomed to death by the explosion. They immediately run from the room, leaving Vossiere, petrified by fear, praying madly for his life. Enipoo, however, takes the fuse out of the powder and averts the explosion. Henriette rushes in and thinks that Vossiere is a hero because he is the only one did not fear death and run. Falling in love with her husband anew, Henriette renounces her lover, Maillet, and he leaves furiously. Enipoo does not want the episode to end happily for Vossiere, and forges a note from Maillet challenging him to a duel outside. Vossiere, mortally afraid, cringes and blubbers in fear, to Henriette's disgust. There is the sound of a shot outside and Vossiere screams for protection and clutches madly at his wife. Henriette, of course, discovers that her husband is not the hero that she thought him. Enipoo appears in the doorway with a smoking rifle, yelling with laughter at his triumph, to be berated by the disappointed and enraged Henriette, who has ended up by losing both her lover and her husband.



## GRASS ON THE PRAIRIE

A One Act Comedy

By

Ruth Schaaf

TIME: 1848

SCENE: A rude cabin on the Illinois prairies.

CHARACTERS: Three men, one woman.

COSTUMES: Rough pioneer clothes.

SYNOPSIS: Enoch, living the hard life of a pioneer in Illinois, hates his lot because he sees no chance to do anything spectacular or to get rich quickly. His friend and neighbor however, loves the country and the wide prairies and visualizes a great future. Enoch needs some one to help him with the work so he decides to get married. A river boat captain that he knows has a big strong, husky daughter. He writes to the captain and everything is arranged, but instead of the husky wench a pale slim girl arrives and tells Enoch that the other girl, her sister has eloped with a steamboat captain. Enoch's reaction is very unromantic. She looks too slim for hard work and he is frankly disgusted. Enoch's friend, however, falls in love with the girl. The marriage is postponed for a few days until the minister arrives. Meanwhile Enoch goes out into the barn and leaves his friend with the girl. A runaway slave who is heading eastward, stumbles exhausted into the cabin, and the girl hides him. When Enoch comes back he discovers the Negro and wants to turn him over to the sheriff, until he hears the story that the Negro tells, about wagons rolling westward with slogans written across them: CALIFORNIA OR BUST. Gold is discovered and Enoch leaves everything, his future wife, his cabin, all his belongings, to join the mad scramble for gold. The girl and Enoch's friend remain together happy and confident of what the future will bring.



## US DORIANS

A Tragedy in One Act

By

Ruth Ellis

TIME: 1832.

SCENE: Interior of a log cabin on Rock River

CHARACTERS: Two women, four men, two boys.

COSTUMES: Pioneer or ordinary farm clothes.

AUDIENCE: Universal.

SYNOPSIS: The Dorians, a pioneer family, came to Illinois shortly before the outbreak of the Black Hawk War. Rollo, second son of the Dorians, and Nona, wife of Josha Dorian, are in love with each other. Since Nona is about to have a child, they decide that Rollo should go away so that Nona can continue her duty as Josha's wife and mother to his child. Mrs. Dorian and Josha, unaware of the relationship existing between the two, refuse Rollo permission and money to go away. Rollo in his fury confesses to Josha his love for Nona. Josha, heartbroken and enraged, curses his brother, severs all ties, and is about to leave when news comes that Black Hawk and his tribes have returned. Rollo, who has gone for the doctor's medicine case, is captured by the Indians. Josha rescues him and is shot. Meanwhile, Nona's child is born; the two brothers go to her bedside and at her request shake hands. Josha, faint from the loss of blood, falls to the floor and dies. At the same time the doctor draws the sheet over Nona's lifeless form. Rollo stands transfixed, shakes his head and says, "She'll be both of ours now - Josha - - forever and ever!"





## A PIECE OF STRATEGY

A One Act Comedy

By

Ruth Schaaf

TIME: 1832

SCENE: Cabin of the Hotchkiss family

CHARACTERS: Four men, four women, one boy

COSTUMES: Rough pioneer clothing

AUDIENCE: Universal

SYNOPSIS: Eli Hotchkiss, a boy of twelve, is behaving a little nervously because his teacher is coming to the house to inform his parents about his unsatisfactory work at school. Eli's father is very strict about such things. Mr. Scraggs, the teacher, is in love with Sarah, Eli's sister, but Sarah despises him because he is boastful and obnoxious in general. Scraggs comes in, hints around a good bit while Eli's heart is in his mouth. At the supper table Scraggs boasts about himself and how he held off a whole band of Indians and saved a white settlement. There is talk about the Indian Black Hawk and the rumors that he is determined to return and to get back his Illinois land. Scraggs promises to protect everybody. Then he turns his attention to Eli and is just about to tell on him when there are shouts, some neighbors come running in, and Indian cries are heard outside. It is Black Hawk's band. All join in the defense except Mr. Scraggs, who has disappeared during the excitement. The Indians are driven off and when the Hotchkisses look for Scraggs he is discovered hidden under the feather bed. As he leaves Eli plucks from his coat a white feather which he got from his contact with the feather bed. He leaves in disgrace and the story about Eli's school trouble is never told.





## HOLY JOE

A Three Act Drama

By

Ruth Schaaf

TIME: 1900

SCENE: Four interiors.

CHARACTERS: Fourteen men, eleven women.

COSTUMES: Frock coat and bustle.

SYNOPSIS: The play deals with a man who became a prophet and drew many men and women around him until his arrogance became too great for men to bear, leading him to his own death. At the beginning his superstitious mother fills his head with mystical ideas. She is awaiting the birth of a child and says that there are omens to indicate that she will bring forth a prophet. But when a girl is born, she weeps and Joe, to calm her, says that he saw a vision in which two angels told him he was the Beloved Son. After this the idea remains with him. He marries, performs an unexpected miracle on a hysterical woman, and soon people flock around him. But his career really begins when he meets Emmet Haney, a man of education and talent, who sees in Joseph Blount the ideal charlatan. Joe's wife is unhappy because Joe philanders. As his star rises Joe gets more and more arrogant. Joe's father undertakes to teach the mayor of a neighboring town a lesson. Because the man is Joe's enemy, Joe's father shoots him. Joe and his brother are arrested as suspects and are put in jail in a neighboring town. Here, removed from his followers, Joe begins to understand that he is hated bitterly by the many enemies he has made. Sticks and stones are thrown in through the window of his cell. He tries to make a speech but is injured when a stone hits him on the head. The sheriff and jailers treat him with disrespect and hatred. At the end the mob leaders break into the cell and lead him off to kill him. Joe, who is dazed by the terrible turn of events, is lead off shouting that he is God's prophet.



# A NIGHT IN THE FOREST

A One-Act Play

By

Leon Kaufman

DATE: May, 1842

TIME: Night

CHARACTERS: Two frontiersmen, three Indian men, and an Indian boy of twelve.

AUDIENCE: Children and adults.

COSTUMES: Two buckskin suits and a feathered head-dress for the Indian men, a small buckskin suit for the boy, and ordinary trousers and cotton shirts for the frontiersmen.

SYNOPSIS: A Sauk warrior, his young son, and a medicine man are camping by a fire in the forest after a day of hunting in Illinois, into which they had come from across the river in Iowa. Around them are such game as beaver, fox, and raccoon, but the real prize is a great buffalo which was killed by the boy with a single arrow.

When the boy was only six months old his father, who had been driven from his home along with other Sauk Indians by the Americans in the Black Hawk War, had a dream in which his ancestors appeared before him. They told him that they had held a great council in the Spirit Land and had chosen his son to be the future chief who would lead his people back to their ancient land in Illinois. They directed the father to observe carefully certain matters concerning the boy's training as a hunter and warrior, including the injunction that, at the age of twelve, the boy must kill his first buffalo with a single arrow in the ancient hunting grounds of the Sauks.

While the Indians are encamped in the forest, two frontiersmen, members of a posse hunting an Indian who had murdered a white man, come upon them and attempt to trick them into trading their buffalo and the other game for whiskey. The Indians refuse to trade or sell, whereupon the frontiersmen, declaring that the game was illegally killed in Illinois, proceed to appropriate the game at gun's point. The boy, who is very proud of his buffalo and anticipates showing it off to his people, can not bear the thought of losing it. Despite their guns, he springs upon one the men and beats at him furiously. The men relent at last when the boy breaks down and sobs brokenheartedly. They leave the buffalo and depart with the other game.

Production Note. The entire action takes place by the campfire, which lights up a radius of about four feet, beyond which is darkness.



## A CAHOKIA STORY

A One-Act Play

By

George Murray

TIME: 1810

PLACE: Trappist monastery in Cahokia, Illinois.

CHARACTERS: One woman, thirteen or fourteen men

COSTUMES: Monks robes for twelve; otherwise period;

AUDIENCE: General Adult (with particular appeal to Catholics.)

SYNOPSIS: Believing his wife dead in an Indian raid, Captain Jack O'Malley, frontiersman, becomes a drunkard and finds peace and reformation in the Trappist Monastery into which he wanders. Not only does he find the peace of mind he has been unable to find outside, but in service to others, he overcomes the hatred for Indians which his disastrous experience had left in him. He does not immediately join the religious order, but after several months, he decides to take the necessary vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and silence. Immediately after he has vowed eternal chastity, he discovers that the wife whom he had thought dead in an Indian raid was one of the few in the village to escape the massacre. At first his superior in the religious order, Father Pierre, tries to help him solve his problem. Then, deciding that not even a Father Superior can be God over the lives of his fellow-men, the kindly priest allows the new monk to work out his own destiny. It is a human story, delicately told, which poses an eternal question at its final curtain. It will compel the tense interest of any adult audience from start to finish.

Production

Note:

The play is virtually a bare stage, being merely the refectory of a poverty-vowed monastery. Costumes are simple. Production is simple and easy but the director should have some human insight to get the most out of the play's situation. Audience must be high school age or beyond.





# SHIP WITHOUT SAILS

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: 1798

PLACE: A Tavern Inn in Bardstown, Ky.

CHARACTERS: Four men, three women.

COSTUMES: Pioneer.

SYNOPSIS: John Fitch has surveyed land in and about Bardstown, Kentucky, claimed the land from the government, and allowed his claim to rest. During the intervening years he worked in the East on his invention of the steamboat. Having lost all of his money he returns to Bardstown only to find that the land he had claimed is settled by farmers and squatters who refuse to recognize his claim. He takes the matter to the courts and the play opens as Fitch, now an old man, is still working on his invention of the steamboat. There is a mob collecting in the town in order to lynch Fitch. Their real motive is that of keeping the lands they have settled, but they have aroused the superstitious by accusing Fitch of witchcraft as proved by his working on a contraption like a steamboat. The mob, led by Mike Trumbull, gathers before the inn, and demands Fitch. A compromise is effected; Mike Trumbull is allowed to enter. He demands that Fitch surrender himself to the mob and is about to take Fitch forcibly, when he is halted by Mrs. Rowan, a friend of Fitch. Mike goes up to his room, and gives him five minutes to give himself up. During the five minutes plans are made among Fitch's friends to outwit the mob, but all are doomed to failure. After five minutes Mike re-enters, and demands John Fitch. No pleas touch him, and he is blind to the dream of a steamboat that will plow the waters on its own power. He is about to go upstairs to bring Fitch down, when he is met by Dr. Thornton who tells Mike that Fitch is dead. Thornton tells them the last words of Fitch, who has given these people all rights to the land. These words so shame Trumbull and the others that they reverse their opinion of Fitch and leave genuinely saddened by his death.

## PRODUCTION

NOTES: This is done in one set, is exciting drama, has a balanced cast, and offers excellent opportunity for characterization.





NORTH STAR

A Drama in One Act

By

Jacob Bentkover

CHARACTERS: Fifteen men, five women, several other men and women.

SETTING: One interior, log cabin.

COSTUMES: Those of a frontier town.

TIME: March, 1834.

PLACE: New Salem, Illinois.

SYNOPSIS: Dr. Allen, abolitionist, has received via the Underground Railway an escaped slave named Charley. He wants to get Charley on to the next station under cover of night, but can't do so because of the presence of the Clary's Grove Boys in the town in one of their rowdy moods. Dr. Allen calls on young Abe Lincoln to help by getting the Clary's Grove Boys out of the way. Despite his hatred of slavery, Abe does not believe in abolition as a solution, and is upset by Allen's revelation. Allen thinks Abe is deterred by his candidacy for the State Legislature, and the fact that the father of Ann Rutledge, his sweetheart, is a Southerner. Abe denies that these factors influence him; but he is still upset and undecided, although Charley comes out of his hiding place to tell his story and plead with Abe. The Clary's Grove Boys, noticing the covered wagon and horses outside the cabin, came prowling in. They finally discover Charley and drag him out.

Charley and Allen appeal to Abe. The Rutledges and several villagers come hurrying in. Abe seems implicated, and Rutledge asks him to clear himself. Abe expresses his ideas, but is not altogether decided one way or the other.

Jack Armstrong, leader of the Boys, seizes Charley. They are about to carry him off, when Abe intervenes. He maneuvers the Boys into accepting his challenge for Charley's freedom: Abe is to wrestle any three of them. Their sporting blood is aroused. The room is cleared. There is a quick series of four falls, Abe losing the third and winning the other three and Charley's freedom. At Abe's request, the Clary's Grove Boys themselves, whooping and shouting, ride off with Charley and Allen to escort them to the next station.



## BLACK GROVE

A Drama in One Act.

By

Jacob Bentskover

CHARACTERS: Fifteen men, two women, two children.

SETTING: One interior, newspaper office.

COSTUMES: Those of an Illinois town in 1847.

TIME: Summer of 1847.

PLACE: Charleston, Illinois.

SYNOPSIS: Abe Lincoln has been the attorney for the recovery of the slave Jane Bryant and her two children, suit for whom has been brought by the slave-owner Matson. Jane's husband Anthony is a freeman and the foreman on Matson's Illinois farm "Black Grove."

Abe has discovered that Matson's suit is based on a fraud, and Abe has thrown the case away. His sympathies have not been with Matson in the first place, although he believes in the enforcement of the law, however obnoxious. Matson is now determined to abduct Jan, her children, and Anthony too, and take them back to his Kentucky plantation. It is known that he is mustering a mob in the town. Anthony and his family have taken refuge with the abolitionist Ashmore. William Harry gets from Abe an article on the case for his newspaper, the "Courier", exposing the fraudulent nature of Matson's claims. Matson enters with several men and demands Abe withdraw the article. On being refused, Matson's men run into the press room and destroy the plates. Abe throws them out.

Harry plans to get the article out as a leaflet in order to weaken Matson's following and prevent the kidnapping, which is evidently planned for that night. The scene ends as the abolitionist Rutherford and Anthony run out to get Jan and her children. That night Jane and her children hide in the basement of the building. Matson and his men, armed, enter. Rutherford, Ashmore, and their men are armed also. Matson demands the leaflets; demands also to know where Anthony and his family are. A crowd gathers outside. Mary accidentally reveals the



presence of the Negroes in the basement. Matson's men run down and drag them up. A riot seems imminent, with Matson getting away with the Bryants. Abe, fearing general bloodshed, retreats.

Anthony in despair seizes a pistol and kills his wife and children, rather than see them go back into slavery. Abe in a rage knocks Matson unconscious and drives out the awed Matson men. The play ends with the realization on Abe's part that there can be no compromise with the slave-owners.





# NORTH LIGHTNING

A Drama in One Act

By

Jacob Bentskover

CHARACTERS: Nine men, three women, one boy.

SETTING: One interior, a parlor.

COSTUMES: Those of urban Illinois in 1861.

TIME: February 4, 1861.

PLACE: Parlor of the Lincoln home in Springfield, Illinois.

SYNOPSIS: Abe Lincoln has been elected President of the United States. As the curtain rises, Pantier, Wilkes, and Blore are in the parlor. They are three southerners, there on a pretext, who plan to assassinate Lincoln before he gets to Washington for the inauguration. Blore is nervous, upset. Lincoln, Mary, and some friends enter from the dining room. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, is suspicious of the three, but Mary, from the South herself, is friendly to them.

Blore's nerve gives way; he becomes ill and is carried upstairs by his companions, Mary going with them. Herndon warns Abe not to trust them. Abe has received threats from all over the country, and he is urged not to go to Washington, but to establish the capital in the North. Abe has sent Mather to Washington to see Scott, the head of the army, and sound him on his loyalty.

Wilkes and Pantier come down with Mary, and ask to see Abe alone, their pretext being a forged letter from a southern friend of Abe's. Herndon and Lamon, Lincoln's other law partner, try to remain, but the indignant Mary assists Abe in ushering them out. As Abe starts to close the door, Blore runs down the stairs. Afraid that his fellow-conspirators plan to leave him to shoulder the punishment for the crime, he shrieks out at them. Pantier and Wilkes attempt to kill Abe, who grapples with Pantier as Lamon and Herndon tackle Wilkes.





The assassins are disarmed. Mather comes in, returned from Washington and tells Abe that General Scott vouches for Lincoln's safety and requests him to come on to Washington.

Abe, taking his escape and other signs as evidence he will live through the crisis, decides to go to Washington to defend the republic.



## TWO PATRIOTS

A Drama in One Act

By

Ruth Ellis

TIME: Civil War, about 1865 - Washington

SETTING: Three interior scenes

CHARACTERS: Nineteen men, one boy, two women

COSTUMES: Ordinary dress.

SYNOPSIS: John Wilkes Booth and his followers feel that the South is being done an injustice - - that slaves are necessary for the maintenance of the culture and existing standards of living in the South. They decide to do away with Lincoln and his cabinet and thus insure victory for the South. Lincoln, on the other hand, believes that all men are created equal; he is determined to continue the war until his purpose, freedom for the Negroes, is achieved. In monologue the character of Booth and then Lincoln is presented. The spot light picks up Booth, who says, "Lincoln must go, Tonight!" "Tonight at the theatre I shall play the leading role of my life. Lincoln must go!" It then picks up Lincoln who is preparing to leave for the theatre. "There is really no time to go to the theatre tonight," he says. "There is too much to be done." He walks to his desk, slowly fingers the pages of his calendar, repeats the words, "Time! Time! Time!" and leaves for the theatre.

### PRODUCTION NOTES:

Simple furnishings. A desk to suggest an office for the second scene.



THE LONG NINE

A Play in One Act

by

Manford Ettinger

TIME: 1836-37.

SCENE: Vandalia, Ill. Three interiors.

CHARACTERS: Twenty-one males.

COSTUMES: Period.

AUDIENCE: High schools, junior, colleges, adult.

SYNOPSIS: Abe Lincoln's first major political triumph in Illinois is his success in procuring the removal of the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield. Although not at that time prominent in state politics, Lincoln is the behind-the-scenes leader of the delegation from Sangamon county -- the famous "Long Nine". The delegation goes to Vandalia pledged to move heaven and earth to secure the Capitol for their county seat, Springfield. For most of the session, their fight looks like a hopeless one. The Vandalia delegation controls the majority of the votes and is determined that Vandalia should remain the capital. Through adroit maneuvering involving a few good old political "horse trades" as well as comic and serious incidents, Lincoln succeeds in outsmarting the Vandalia men. The capital is moved to Springfield, and Lincoln's political reputation is established on a state-wide basis for the first time.

PRODUCTION NOTES:

Two simple interiors and a series of short blackouts. Could be done with a minimum of setting and properties. Offers broad acting opportunities for a variety of characters.





MRS. MARY LINCOLN - WIDOW

A one-act Drama - One Scene

by

David Peltz

TIME: 1874

SCENE: A simple interior of a room in the Grand Pacific Hotel

CHARACTERS: Three males: One female

COSTUMES: Civilian dress characteristic of the period.

AUDIENCE: General

SYNOPSIS: Ten years after the assassination of her husband, Mrs. Mary Lincoln's life of tragedy is seen reaching its climax in her culminating insanity. Her son, Robert, an established lawyer, must decide whether or not to declare his mother insane and confine her to an asylum. In the face of unfavorable press notices describing his mother's strange behavior, of his law business failing, of his wife's persistent logic that the most intelligent thing to do is to recognize the reality of his mother's condition, Robert refuses to give in. He knows only too well that when public records show "Mary Lincoln, lunatic," the blot on his family's name never can be erased. Not even when Doctor Morgan tells him that his mother's illness is beyond hope for recovery -- that it is directly traceable to a growth on the brain, does Robert feel that insanity is a justifiable diagnosis. Then, from the next room in which his mother is convalescing, comes the explosive crash of furniture being smashed and the angry, maddening wail of his mother: "Robert! Robert!" The cry penetrates his brooding, non-committal silence. Robert slowly takes his pen in hand and looks in the direction of his mother's calling. With a choked, grim voice of resolution, he says: "I'm coming, Mother. I'm coming." And before the pen has touched paper (his signature will send Mrs. Lincoln to an institution) the curtain slowly falls.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

Simple to produce.



ECHO OF CONFLICT

A Play in One Act

by

Manford Ettinger

TIME: January, 1865, evening.

SCENE: Parlor of the Kendall home, Chicago.

CHARACTERS: Seven males, three females.

COSTUMES: Civil War period.

AUDIENCE: College, Little Theatre, Adult.

SYNOPSIS: Chicago, during the last year of the Civil War, provides the background for this tragedy of divided loyalties. Southern-born Jeanette Kendall has found it difficult to feel at home in this Northern industrial city. The progress of the Civil War, with the attendant growth of bitter feeling against the Confederacy, has only serve to strengthen her loyalty to the South and inflame her hatred of the Yankees who, she believes, are persecuting her homeland. She joins a group of Southern sympathizers who are engaged in treasonable sabotage behind the lines. She manages to conceal her activities from her husband until she is apprehended by secret service operatives. When her husband confronts her with his knowledge of her guilt, she defends her conduct as being only right in view of her conception of the injustice of the North. She upbraids her husband for his lack of loyalty to their mutual birth-place, the South. He tries to make her see that his home is the whole Union and that the South is in the wrong in attempting to break it up. In view of her husband's prominent position, she is offered parole into his custody in exchange for a full confession of the extent of the treasonable work and the persons engaged in it. Her husband pleads with her to accept the offer for the sake of their home and their eight year old son. Although shaken, she refuses. She attempts to escape to the South in the clothes of a Union soldier, and is shot and killed by the secret service men guarding her house.

PRODUCTION

NOTES: One simple interior. No production difficulties.



A NEW DAY COMING

A Play in One Act

by

Manford Ettinger

TIME: Spring, 1861, morning.

SCENE: The sun-porch of a plantation home near Cairo, Ill.

CHARACTERS: Fourteen males, two females.

COSTUMES: Civil War period.

AUDIENCE: College, Little Theatre, Adult.

SYNOPSIS: The famous surprise expedition of the newly-formed Union regiment from Chicago to Cairo, Illinois in the opening year of the Civil War, forms the historical background for this play. Mrs. Sophia Ford, owner of a cotton plantation near Cairo, is expecting the arrival of her son James after a long absence in the North. James has been studying engineering and has indicated his wish to devote his life to this profession. Mrs. Ford hopes to persuade him to give up the idea of an engineering career and manage the plantation.

She has put her whole life into the place and now finds herself incapable of continuing to run it. James arrives as a lieutenant in the Union regiment sent down from Chicago. Mrs. Ford is greatly shocked to see him in uniform. She tries to persuade him that his place is on the plantation, but he has no stomach for the role of planter. James is of the new generation of forward-looking young people who see in the development of industrialism the promise of a new day for their country. As such he is an enthusiastic and articulate supporter of the Union cause. As she realizes the extent of this enthusiasm, Mrs. Ford feels her world -- the world of cotton and its feudal traditions -- crumbling around her. She knows that the plantation to which she has devoted her life must be sold. She feels that her son is a stranger to her. When she leaves the stage we know that she plans to end her life by taking an overdose of sleeping tablets left by her doctor. Unaware of the tragedy, James marches off to duty with his regiment.

PRODUCTION NOTES: One exterior. No production difficulties.





# APOSTLE OF FREEDOM

A One Act Drama

By  
Charles Hayes

TIME: 1837.

SCENE: Gilman's Warehouse, Alton, Ill.

CHARACTERS: Eighteen men. (Extras)

COSTUMES: Period.

AUDIENCE: Adult.

SYNOPSIS: Winthrop S. Gilman, Royal Weller, the Reverend Harned, and eight other friends of the Reverend Elijah Lovejoy, publisher of the abolitionist Alton Observer, are gathered in Gilman's warehouse to protect the new press which has arrived that morning. Three presses belonging to Lovejoy have already been destroyed. The men are waiting for the arrival of Lovejoy, confident that nothing is going to happen after all. Lovejoy and Roff, an abolitionist, bring the news that Carr, a slaver advocate, is gathering a mob and that an attempt may be made to take the press. Gilman tries to persuade Lovejoy to flee Alton with his family and leave the defense of the press to his friends. Lovejoy refuses to go. When the mob prepares to storm the warehouse, Lovejoy, hoping to pacify them, appeals to them to disperse. His appeal is countered by a hate-fanning speech by Mississippi, a leader of the mob. The attack begins. The mob is repulsed, but forms for another attack. In the interim, Krum, mayor of Alton, and Robbins, a justice of the peace, act as emissaries of the mob and bring terms of surrender. Lovejoy refuses these terms and demands that the mayor give him and his friends police protection. Krum refuses. Krum and Robbins rejoin the mob, and the attack is renewed. An attempt is made to fire the warehouse. Lovejoy is shot down in the doorway as he makes a last appeal to the mob to avoid bloodshed. The defenders, hopelessly outnumbered, dash out a side door. The mob, led by Mississippi, and Carr, come bursting in and take the press.

PRODUCTION

NOTES: Should be realistically presented. Few props necessary.





## WARTIME PRISONERS

A One Act Play

By

Ruth Ellis

TIME: 1865, Camp Douglas, Chicago.

SETTING: Interior of a Civil War prison camp.

CHARACTERS: Eight men, and prison guards.

COSTUMES: Prison garb, ordinary old clothes.

SYNOPSIS: Lewis, a plantation laborer, and Hartley, son of a plantation owner, are being held as prisoners of war at Camp Douglas. In spite of mutual sufferings and hardships, their enmity, caused by a pre-war love triangle, continues to increase. With the arrival of the mail, Hartley learns that Lewis has been victorious in winning the lady's affections. He curses Lewis and threatens that he will never get out of there alive. Meanwhile plans have been made for a prison break. Lewis, as leader, after much difficulty has succeeded in winning the support of the men. The signal for the break is given, the men make for the door and are met by guards who had been "tipped off" by Hartley. In the confusion a gun is fired and Lewis falls to the floor dead. Hartley swaggers contentedly to his bunk.



BORDER STATE

One Act Play

By

George Murray

TIME: A fall night in 1860.

SCENE: Roadside tavern in southern Illinois.

CHARACTERS: Five men, one woman.

COSTUMES: Period; frontier.

AUDIENCE: General.

SYNOPSIS: Parker, a itinerant printer-newspaperman, wanders into a frontier tavern in Southern Illinois just in time to sense that there is something in the air between the tavern owner, Hank, and his daughter, Barbara. Sensing a conspiracy, he pretends to go to bed but stays awake hoping for a story. When a Negro slave enters the tavern surreptitiously, Parker realizes that the saloon is a station on the well-organized Underground Railway. A plantation-owner and his overseer enter looking for the Negro. Before admitting them, the tavern-owner hides the Negro under the bar. The story builds up with the reappearance of the newspaperman, who comes downstairs from his room. He appears torn between the desire to get the reward offered by the plantation-owner and the hope of remaining in the good graces of the girl, Barbara. How he succeeds in doing both, at the same time throwing the plantation bosses off the scent and aiding in the escape of the Negro slave, makes a thrilling climax to this one-act, one-scene play.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

This will be found to be a particularly simple play to produce and direct.



A LILY FOR A LADY

A One-act Satire

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: Evening, 1882

SCENE: The home of Mr. Clevenger, Chicago

CHARACTERS: Five males, five women

COSTUMES: Period of 1882

AUDIENCE: Universal

SYNOPSIS: Mr. Clevenger and Mr. Thorne, railroad magnates of Chicago, are endeavoring to obtain a loan from Mr. Billings, a banker. Mrs. Clevenger is excited because she is entertaining Oscar Wilde, the great English author and playwright, that night. Phillip Carson, a young man, is in love with Beatrice Clevenger, daughter of the Clevenger's, but she is very excited because Oscar Wilde has offered to put her on the stage, and she breaks her engagement with Phillip. Billings says that he will give Clevenger his loan if he will induce Oscar Wilde to accept an invitation to his house the next evening. Wilde finally arrives. In spite of his active dislike for Billings he is induced to accept his invitation. Phillip accuses Wilde of breaking up his love affair with Beatrice by offering her a stage career. Wilde says he will right matters and does so by offering every woman in the house a stage career, including the homely Olivia Thorne, Mrs. Thorne, Mrs. Clevenger, and even the maid. Beatrice is so shaken that she decides to marry Phillip after all, and Wilde exits in a blaze of glory.

PRODUCTIONS

NOTES: This is an extremely easy play to stage and should go well for almost all groups. Good opportunity for acting in all parts. Could be played against drapes or cyclorama.





SPEAK SOFTLY OF THE DEAD

A One Act Poetic Fantasy

By

Joe Abrams

- TIME: About 1875. Early afternoon.
- SCENE: A cemetery in Lincoln Park, Chicago.
- CHARACTERS: Twelve men, three women, two boys.
- COSTUMES: One Indian costume, two male pioneer costumes, one confederate uniform, one Union uniform, two colonial gowns, one police uniform, and other costumes of 1875.
- AUDIENCE: Adult and college, and advanced high school groups.
- SYNOPSIS: A cemetery in Chicago is being removed so that the land may be used for a park. Bodies are being exhumed for removal. Some of the uncovered dead awake from their sleep and gather to see if they can learn why they have been disturbed. They do not know that they have been dead but learn it finally from The Pioneer. They are shocked at the knowledge and decide that they will refuse to leave their resting ground. Then the living enter, and the dead step into the background, listening. The living explain dramatically the need for a park in this growing city. Suddenly they are confronted with the dead who steadfastly refuse to leave. There is an argument, and the dead are finally convinced that the earth belongs to the living.
- PRODUCTION NOTES: This play may be done with only the cut out of a gravestone up center and two benches, one right and one left. Lights should be soft for an ethereal tone throughout.



GARDEN OF EDEN

A One Act Play

By

Ruth Schaaf

TIME: 1893

SCENE: Parlor in a Chicago home

CHARACTERS: Three men, three women.

COSTUMES: Close of the nineteenth century.

SYNOPSIS: The husband in this family has worked hard to give his family all the luxuries they want. Now he has on his hands a selfish and foolish wife, and a spoiled daughter. The daughter is engaged to a young doctor who is expecting a handsome settlement from his fiancée's father. With this money the young couple intend to take their place among Chicago's aristocracy. Meanwhile the father has met a college professor at the World's Fair and becoming interested in an expedition the professor tells him about, promises to finance it. When the wife learns what is going to happen to the money she confronts him in a scene in which man and wife finally face each other in the showdown of their lives. And the woman wins..



BY-PRODUCTS OF ABATTOIR

A One Act Play

By

Ruth Ellis

TIME: About 1890.

SETTING: A room of a can-painting factory, Chicago.

CHARACTERS: Eight women, four men, one boy.

COSTUMES: Clothes of the period.

SYNOPSIS: A play of the Chicago stockyards about 1890. Due to the death of her father by blood poisoning contracted at the stockyards, Lela Oddo, a fragile girl of twenty, is forced to work in a can-painting factory. In spite of her impoverished state, her lack of education and opportunity, aspiring Lela has submitted a painting to compete for an artist's commission at the forth-coming Columbian Exposition. Success comes to her, but too late -- she has been sent to a tubercular sanitarium.



# FLOTSAM

A One Act Drama

By

Charles Hayes

TIME: Present, 10:00 P. M.  
SCENE: A flophouse near West Madison St.  
CHARACTERS: Five men  
COSTUMES: Rough working clothes  
AUDIENCE: Adults.

SYNOPSIS: Rags and Smith, two down-and outers, are alone in a flophouse, discussing the possibilities or wheedling the other inmates out of some money. Both men are addicted to drink, and both are tortured by hunger. At the animal level to which they have sunk, thirst and hunger become a force propelling them to action. Davis, an old derelict, enters, picks up his blanket, and prepares to sleep. The flophouse has claimed him long ago, until now he moves through life in a drunken stupor. Smith and Rags ask him for money and liquor. Receiving no response Smith strongarms Davis while Rags goes through his pockets. They find nothing. Bud, a youth temporarily down on his luck, enters. He has been passing out circulars for several days, attempting to save enough money to get to Denver where he has a brother who has promised him a job. Rags and Smith try to obtain money from Bud by appealing to his pity; when their appeal fails, they begin to abuse him. Red, a hobo, enters. He has no money, but shares his tobacco with the men. Rags and Smith, sensing that Bud is the only inmate with money, renew their appeal. Once again Bud refuses them. The men stretch out to sleep. Red is so tormented by the vermin which infest the place, that he gets up and goes out. Rags and Smith go through the sleeping Bud's pockets, find his money and take it. Davis' and Bud's shoes are also taken, because, as Smith puts it, "they might be good for a drink."

## PRODUCTION

NOTES: No props necessary.





## SHADOWS OF THE PAST

A Comedy Melodrama in two scenes

By

Victor Schafer

TIME: Winter, 1907.

SCENE: West Side in Chicago.

CAST: Eight men, three women

COSTUMES: 1907 dress, one dinner gown, one tuxedo.

AUDIENCE: Adult

SYNOPSIS: Nora, three years before the opening of the play, has been befriended by Jimsy White, a notorious criminal, who has spent the ensuing time in prison. Nora, with \$500 left her by Jimsy, has taken a business course and has secured work with Mr. Hollister, bank president. Hollister and Nora fall in love, but the spectre of Jimsy stands in their way. Hollister presumably does not know of the former liason. Jimsy escapes prison, breaks into Nora's home, and steals several hundred dollars which she has been saving. Later on Jimsy returns and hides \$25,000, which he has stolen from Hollister's bank. The detectives appear to search for the stolen money and unearth the \$25,000. Hollister arrives, and tells the detectives not to search further because he himself has made good the loss at the bank. Nora has made a pact with Jimsy, in return for former favors, to the effect that she will not turn him in to the police until 8 P.M., thus giving him a chance to escape. But Jimsy returns to retrieve the \$25,000, is captured by the police, and Nora, who is now free of him, confesses her former association with him to Hollister. He tells her he was aware of the situation all along, and is willing to ignore her past. Thus the play ends happily for all except Jimsy White.

NOTE: This is done in two scenes. The set is the same for both scenes. Several of the male characters may be doubled if necessary, although this is not advisable unless circumstances so dictate. Good comedy lines, good character lines throughout.



## SHIFTING SANDS

A Comedy Drama in Two  
A Comedy Drama in Two Scenes

By  
Victor Schafer

TIME: April 21, 1857

SCENES: a. Mayor John Wentworth's office.

b. "The Sands" on Chicago's lake front

CAST: Eight men, one woman, fifteen to twenty extras.

COSTUMES: Plain dress of 1857.

AUDIENCE APPEAL: Adult.

SYNOPSIS: "Long John" Wentworth, mayor of Chicago, is determined to destroy The Sands, a lake front section which is the center of the city's vice and crime. He has called in legal advice, and is advised to tear the place down. However, Boodles Hays, owner of The Sands, declares he will get out an injunction. Wentworth goes on with his plans. He has a map in which the Sands is marked in red, and he tells his chief of police that by the next morning he wants the red on the map changed to white.

The following scene takes place in The Sands that night. Some of the inhabitants of The Sands, including Clancy, Cleo, and Boehm, are discussing a murder which occurred the night before. In the distance they see a fire, but are not concerned with it. Clancy says that if the police raid them that night he is equipped to shoot it out with them. The police come, and the captain of police is wounded by Clancy. Hays argues with the chief of police, trying to talk him into calling off the raid, but the chief replies by arresting as many of The Sands' inhabitants as he can. He has also arrested Cleo's "ladies", but Cleo, a notorious demimondaine, refuses to come out of her house. The Chief of Police goes into her house, struggles with her, and rolls down the stairs in a tangle of poll parrot, feather boas, etc. At this moment the mayor enters and berates the chief for not taking his business seriously instead of playing with the girls. And now the fire has spread and will soon wipe out The Sands. The mayor knows that "the red blot on the map will be white tomorrow."

NOTE: This play is full of fast action and should play well to adult audiences.



## THE MUSIC TEACHER

A One Act Play

By  
Joe Abrams

TIME: Evening, 1901.  
SCENE: Office of Theodore Thomas  
SETS: One interior.  
CHARACTERS: Five men, two women.

SYNOPSIS: Wessels, business manager of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and McTravers, an officer of the Orchestral Association, are in the office of Theodore Thomas, while the latter is conducting the orchestra in a concert. McTravers is of the opinion that Thomas should make his concerts more popular by playing more tuneful music such as dances, gavottes, etc., while Wessels disagrees. Consuelo and Maria enter to see Thomas but are told to leave. They do so. Mrs. Thomas enters, and McTravers exits. Wessels shows Mrs. Thomas a telegram which tells that Thomas's son has died that day in New York. They decide not to tell Thomas the news until next day. During intermission of the concert Thomas enters and gets into an argument with McTravers about the type of music he should play. Thomas has insulted one of the patrons of the orchestra by halting the concert while the patron and his wife indulged in pointless conversation in the audience. If Thomas would play more melodic music perhaps the orchestra could balance its budget. This Thomas refuses to do because it is his purpose to educate the people to enjoy and appreciate good music. Mr. Hendermann, a representative of the New York Philharmonic, enters and offers Thomas a position as conductor of the Philharmonic with no strings attached. Thomas is doubtful until he learns about the death of his son. Then, in grief for the death of his son, and in disappointment because his crusade of educating Chicagoans has failed, he accepts the offer, is about to leave the hall without completing the second portion of the concert. Consuelo and Maria enter again. They are sitting in the gallery and worship Thomas as a godlike creature. In a dramatic scene they convince Thomas that while he might have failed to educate the millionaires to good music he has succeeded well in educating the common people in the galleries. Upon learning this Thomas decides to stay in Chicago and continue his crusade.





## COLUMBUS MISSED THE BOAT

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: Summer, 1933

SCENE: The office of L-on-Wheels, Chicago.

COSTUMES: Combination Indian and modern

CHARACTERS: Six men, two women.

AUDIENCE: General

SYNOPSIS: L-on-Wheels, an Indian, believes that the Great White Gods are someday going to discover America, and in order to greet them properly has built the Chicago World's Fair. It seems, as the title implies, that America has never been discovered by the white man. His daughter is engaged to marry Higher-Water, the son of Mrs. Nose-in-Stars. If the Great White Gods do not arrive by seven o'clock tonight, all of L-on-Wheels' money will be gone and he and his daughter will be destitute. Mrs. Nose-in-Stars gets a psychiatrist to declare L-on-Wheels insane so that the wedding can be cancelled. Seven o'clock has finally passed and still no White Gods have arrived. L-on-Wheels admits that he is insane, but finally the White God arrives in an airplane. He tells them, however, that it is not yet seven o'clock because the savages know nothing about Central Standard Time. He then makes them a gift of "civilization," which ironically enough consists of guns, hand grenades, bombs, whiskey, etc.

NOTE: This is a mad farce, full of historical anachronisms and should be a laugh-provoking, entertaining half hour for audiences of all types.

# THE HISTORY OF THE

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DUE PROCESS OF LAW

A Play in One Act

By

Jacob Bentkover

CHARACTERS: Ten men.

SETTING: One interior, a saloon.

TIME: August 4, 1872. Midnight.

PLACE: Chicago, Illinois.

SYNOPSIS: Based on the famous "Rafferty Murder Case", as related in Volume III of A. T. Andreas' History of Chicago.

Christopher Rafferty, with a feeling of persecution that has grown since his birth in the Chicago slums, is incensed at the unwarranted arrest of his pal and roommate, Johnny Candler, for loitering in front of a bakery window. Johnny has been unemployed and hungry. The police of the neighborhood are becoming increasingly arrogant, but Chris has a gun and has sworn that no policeman shall arrest him while he is armed. Policeman Patrick O'Meara has heard of the threat and is determined to accept the challenge. On the night in question, Rafferty is seated in the saloon drunk, and resentful, when O'Meara and another policeman, Scanlan, appear.

Rafferty quietly invites them to have a drink with him, and offers them cigars - both of which they refuse. O'Meara then comes up to Rafferty and presents him with a warrant for his arrest, for robbery. Amazed, Rafferty protests his innocence. It then is revealed by certain defects in the warrant that it has been forged by O'Meara for the purpose of calling Rafferty's challenge and making the arrest. Enraged beyond control, Rafferty pulls his gun. O'Meara and Scanlan retreat to the front and rear doors. O'Meara demands the gun. Rafferty shoots and kills him - then wheels on Scanlan, firing. Scanlan ducks behind the bar - and after the enraged Rafferty has emptied his gun, leaps at him and clubs Rafferty unconscious. The police arrive and take Rafferty away. It is clear that, though the warrant was forged and Rafferty was drunk and deranged by police persecution, he will be hanged for premeditated murder.

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## A MAID IN PERIL

A one-act Comedy Melodrama

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: June 1, 1868.

SCENE: The Bideawhile gambling den, Chicago.

SETS: One interior.

CHARACTERS: Two men, two women.

SYNOPSIS: Felix Murkwater, villian and owner of the Bideawhile Gambling Den, has promised to marry Sal, a girl whom he has led on the downward path. Now he refuses to do so. She says that if ever she finds him making love to another she will kill him. She goes and Frank Strongheart, the hero, enters. He begs Murkwater to give up his evil ways and close his gambling den. Murkwater refuses and threatens to wreak vengeance on Valerie True-love, with whom Frank is in love. Frank goes and Valerie enters to plead with Murkwater not to foreclose the mortgage he holds on the home of Valerie's invalid mother. Murkwater says he will withhold foreclosure if Valerie will accept his attentions. She refuses. He tries to force a kiss from her unwilling lips, but she is rescued in the nick of time by Frank, who breaks in and fights with Murkwater only to receive a wound in the shoulder, which incapacitates him. Frank is threatened with a horrible death. Murkwater again tries to force a kiss from Valerie while the helpless Strongheart looks on. Sal enters, sees Murkwater carrying on with Valerie, picks up a gun, and shoots Murkwater. Murkwater dies, but first bequeaths the Bideawhile and his money to Frank Strongheart so that he can make a Boy's Club out of the building, and gives Valerie the mortgage on her mother's home. All ends well.

NOTE: This is very melodramatic and should derive its main comedy from the triteness of situation and the posing and overacting of the characters.





# THE STRANGER IN THE PITS

A Long One Act Drama

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: Afternoon, 1909.

SCENE: A room in a coal mine at Cherry, Ill.

CHARACTERS: Twelve males, two females.

COSTUMES: Period of 1909, but could be modern.

AUDIENCE: Junior colleges and adult.

SYNOPSIS: Six men are trapped in a room in a coal mine with no way of escape. The Stranger (Death) is there also. One of the men dies through the ministrations of The Stranger, and when the others discover who he is they react in different and characteristic ways. The Stranger attempts to show them why he has chosen them for death. He has brought Stasch here, for instance, so that his girl might marry the man she loves. Tony is here so that his son might use the insurance money to become a doctor. Chris, so that his son may be cured of tuberculosis. Jordon, the mine manager, is here at his own invitation because the disaster is due in a large measure to his own negligence and incompetence. Each of these explanations entails a flashback, either to another scene or to another time. Finally, the men are either reconciled to their fate or, as in the case of Jordon, unable to reconcile themselves. The Stranger picks up a kerosene lamp and blows it out, the inference being that they have crossed the barrier to the unknown.

## PRODUCTION

NOTES: The scene in the mine can be done realistically insofar as setting is concerned, or it can be played against dark drapes and dim lights. The flashback scenes may be set by pushing on a few pieces of furniture and directing a spotlight on the action.





# THE CASE OF THE STOLEN CADAVER

A One Act Drama

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: The present and 1820.

SCENE: Two interiors and two exteriors to be done very effectively on bare stage with minimum of properties. \*

CHARACTERS: Sixteen males, one female.

COSTUMES: Four modern dress. Thirteen costumes in 1820 period.

AUDIENCE: Would appeal to high schools and adults.

SYNOPSIS: Dr. Kerr, a young doctor of a hospital staff, has just performed an operation in the middle of the night and is tired and disillusioned with the medical profession. He talks of giving up when Dr. Murphy, an elderly staff physician, interrupts to tell him the story of Dr. Drake, a pioneer doctor of the Midwest in the 1820's. The scene shifts to 1820. Four students of a medical school are arrested on charges of stealing a cadaver from a graveyard. Their careers are jeopardized, but with the help of Dr. Drake and a clever lawyer they are released. Dr. Drake becomes involved in a controversy with Dr. Dudley as to the ownership of the cadaver, and Drake is challenged to a duel but refuses to fight. Dr. Richardson, a friend of Drake's, in turn challenges Dudley and they fight a duel. Richardson is seriously wounded, and when Drake enters and tries to minister to his wounds he finds he is unable to operate effectively. Dudley pushes Drake aside and saves the life of Richardson. Then the two former mortal enemies, Drake and Dudley, become fast friends. The scene shifts again to the present. Dr. Kerr realizes that one has to fight continually to uphold and carry on the mission of medicine, and resolves dramatically to continue the fight of the pioneer doctors.

## \* PRODUCTION

NOTES: Only the barest suggestions of sets are necessary: a table, chair, bench, etc. A spotlight on the action is sufficient lighting in the interior scenes. In exterior scenes only a bare stage is required against a background of drapes or cyclorama.



## PROMISED LAND

A One Act Drama

By

Ruth Schaaf

TIME: 1860

SCENE: A cabin in Illinois

CHARACTERS: Eight men, two women.

COSTUMES: Farm Clothes.

SYNOPSIS: Magda Lupu and her husband Paul have come to America on the immigration wave that followed political trouble in Europe. They are happy here, living simple lives in Illinois. The minister's wife drops in and converses with Magda. She tells Magda about their neighbor, Mr. Jones, who doesn't take proper care of his family. She leaves and Mr. Jones comes in. Magda and Paul realize that something is amiss. Jones tells them that he is being hunted by a mob who have found out about his Abolitionist activities, have destroyed his printing press, shot his companion, and are now pursuing him. Paul is shocked that here, in the land of freedom, a man should be persecuted for writing against slavery. He tells Jones that he will hide him. But the minister's wife has seen Jones enter the house and has informed the leaders of the mob. Paul pleads with the men, invokes the principles on which our nation is founded, freedom of speech, freedom to publish one's opinions, but the mob leaders jeer. They take Jones out with them. Magda expresses her disappointment in this land which had seemed so fair to her but Paul points out that America is not the few lawless men who behave like bandits, but rather the place where injustice has the least chance of survival and men never forget that all men are created equal.



## THE DEVIL AHORSEBACK

A Comedy-Tragedy in One Act

By

Victor Schafer

TIME: Autumn, 1870

SCENE: A one-room wooden shack in the Ozark mountains of southern Illinois.

CAST: Three women, one to two men.

COSTUMES: Coarse cotton dresses and overalls.

AUDIENCE: General

SYNOPSIS: Maw Crippen and her daughter Matty have recently come here from North Carolina, and continue their hill billy existence with Paw Crippen (who does not appear). They have lost their cow Bessie in the migration and Paw is drinking so much he can't provide fresh food by hunting. Maw sells Matty for \$50 to Tom Stubblefield, a game warden of the county. Matty is in love with Sid Tolliver, a local yokel, who has a job in the saw mill. Matty pleads for a chance with Sid or even a job with some city campers as cook. Maw replies that the sale has been made and the Crippens are an honorable family. Mrs. Paudell, a neighbor, notifies them that Paw Crippen has been again locked up in the village jail, but is shortly to be sent to the county jail far away. Maw is about to leave when Matty offers her a snuff box, now filled with rat poison according to Maw. Maw leaves. Matty has a long pantomime scene in which she mentally speculates on death for herself. She opens box, smells it, lets it run thru her hands and then slowly and deliberately takes a white cup from the shelf, pours hot horsemint tea into the cup and sits at table. She pours the box of poison in cup and is about to drink it when Tom who is drunk comes in with a bunch of bananas he has promised Maw. He drops the bananas and, slumps into chair at table. He has a stomach-ache and Matty takes down the blue cup and fills it with the tea and offers it to him. He grabs her in an amorous embrace, and in the scuffle the cups are disarranged on table and Tom picks up white one and drinks it. Another pantomime scene for Matty, watching him plunge to the table and then the floor. She pokes him with bare foot and knowing him dead, puts on shoes and shawl and goes to door and calls, "Hey, Maw, another rat's been kilt."





# SPIRIT OF ABOLITION

One Act Play

By

Carl F. Williamson

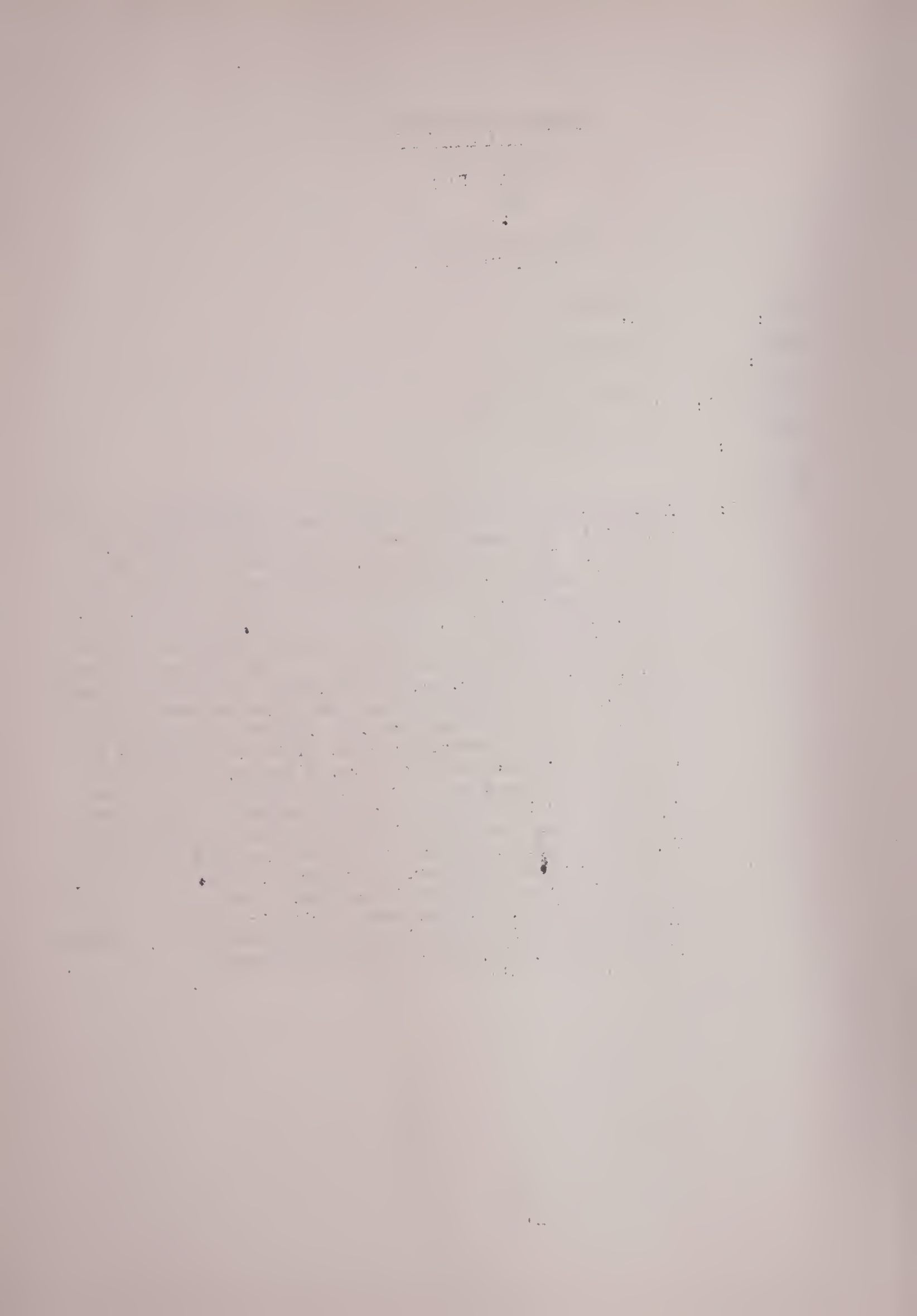
TIME: 20 minutes

SCENE: One exterior

CHARACTERS: Eight men, one woman

COSTUMES: Early American

SYNOPSIS: An erlderly couple passes the courtyard and sees the placards advertising the sale of a colored man, Edwin Heathcock, in Illinois. They become alarmed. The sheriff notices them discussing the affair and intimidates them. He pushes the old lady around and knocks the old man to the ground. Mr. Ogden, an abolitionist, helps the couple off stage, leaving the sheriff talking to John Jones, a progressive Negro who begs for the release of the prisoner who is to be sold for striking his employer, Mr. Elliott. Jones reviews the case and declares that Heathcock is innocent. Mr. Elliott enters and gives his view of the case. Mr. Ogden enters and plays on the side of the sheriff and Mr. Elliott. He appears to be interested in buying Heathcock. When Mr. Ogden and the Mr. Jones are alone on the stage, he sends Jones after a couple of huskies who are to tie and lock Mr. Elliott in the jail in order to keep him from bidding at the auction. Mr. Ogden convinces the sheriff to let him have the keys to look over the prisoner. He takes Mr. Elliott with him. The huskies come on stage with a rope. They go to the jail and lock Mr. Elliott. The sheriff is surprised at not finding Elliott in the audience to buy the prisoner. The bidding starts. Mr. Ogden buys the prisoner for a quarter, then tells him he's free to go where he desires.



# THE STORMING OF SEBASTOPOL

A Comedy in One Act

By

Jacob Bentkover

CHARACTERS: Four men and one woman, extras

SETTING: The interior of a saloon - not a complex set, since this is in the period when the small-town saloon was still emerging from the small-town grocery.

TIME: Friday, April 4, 1856

PLACE : Canton, Fulton County, Illinois.

SYNOPSIS: The play is based on an incident related in Chapman's History of Fulton County, and takes place during the period when the temperance movements were beginning to sweep the country.

The "Sebastopol" is the saloon owned by Frank Mallory. The Ladies Temperance Society of Canton has been trying to close it under the dry law, without success. On the day in question they are assembling with hatchets under their shawls to smash the place. Belinda Boorchee, president of the society, comes into the saloon to get the picture of her that Mallory has suspended behind the bar. He refuses, tells her he loves her, and proposes to her. She will have nothing to do with a liquor dealer, however. In the course of the argument she agrees that if he ever succeeds in kissing her, she will marry him. Since he remains stubborn about closing his place, however, she smashes the pictures, and leaves.

Steve Tyler, the sheriff, and Frank's friend, runs in with the news that the women are going to storm the place. Frank sends a couple of men to round up a defense corps. While the men of the town gather to defend their rights, Frank and Steve pile obstructions against the doors. The women arrive with their armaments. The men, faced with their own womenfolk, coze away. The women break in, smash up the one or two kegs on stage, and descend to the cellar (trapdoor off-stage). They break open all the casks, spilling the contents on the cellar floor. In the confined space, the fumes are overpowering to constitutions unaccustomed to liquor, and the ladies of the Ladies Temperance Society of Canton become tipsy.



In alarm, the few ladies onstage get them up hurriedly and out into the square to read the resolution they have prepared. In the confusion, Frank manages to corral the dazed Belinda, closes the doors, and - while the ladies outside read the Resolution swearing to close up any place that tries to re-open - he plants the fatal kiss upon her lips. Being a woman of her word - and not disinclined to him - she agrees to marry him. It looks as if they will have to sell groceries instead of liquor anyway.

They march out into the square with their news, to the amazement of the ladies and the cheers of the men.



## REVENGE AT NAUVOO

A drama in one act

By

David Peltz

- TIME: 1846
- SCENE: The interior of Brigham Young's study.
- COSTUMES: Civilian and frontier clothes characteristic of the period.
- AUDIENCE: College, little theatre, adult.
- SYNOPSIS: Brigham Young and his faithful bodyguard Goliath are confronted with the problem of preventing an irascible political opportunist by the name of Tomkins from forcing the Mormons into evacuating Nauvoo in the short space of two hours. But no matter what means Young employs, no matter what solution he concocts, he still is faced with the ultimatum: "If'n him and his lot o' perlygamists is still in Nauvoo by the time two hours is up- then me and ma' eight hundred followers is a goin' ta string him and his hull committee to a sour apple tree." Young has no alternative but "to git." But before he leaves, Brigham induces the naive Goliath to kill Tomkins to avenge the injustices wrought on his people by the cruel and unprincipled Tomkins. Goliath, at Brigham's command, kills calmly in the name of everything good and holy. Only after a suspenseful moment however, does he succeed. And when Goliath wipes out Tomkins we see his strange figure breathe with a tranquil and inner sense of accomplishment as he thanks his Master for giving him the privilege of serving His needs.
- PRODUCTION NOTES: This play is simple to produce and direct. Offers excellent opportunities for characterization.





"YOU'RE ASKING FOR IT"

(One-Act Comedy-Drama in Two Scenes)

By

George Murray

TIME: A spring day in 1883;

SCENE: The mining village of Spring Valley, Illinois

CHARACTERS: Seven men, two women.

COSTUMES: Striped trousers and cutaways for two male characters; otherwise, in period.

AUDIENCE: General.

SYNOPSIS: Although dealing with a labor situation, the broad burlesque in this play makes it suitable for general audience with particular appeal to the sophisticated. It is the story of a strike in the coal mines. The mine owner, Harkness, calls in the strike-breaking agency operated by Maw and Sock Pinkham. Arrived on the scene, Pinkham, who is a mining engineer, discovers valuable minerals in the land of the miners. The mine owners agree with him that it will be more profitable to settle the strike as the way to make money out of a coal mine is to operate it with miners, not with hired help that know nothing of the job. In the course of settling the strike, Pinkham falls in love with Harkness' pretty secretary and Harkness displays feeling for Pinkham's business-like mother, Maw Pinkham. The miners' mineral-bearing property is bought, giving them all a handsome profit on the deal, their wage-cut is restored to end the strike, and all is peace and harmony at the final curtain.

PRODUCTION

NOTES: This is a simple play to produce and direct. Its basic humor makes it suitable for general audience, but its broad satire and burlesque makes it particularly appropriate for a sophisticated or a labor audience.



WEEP NO MORE

A One Act Drama

By

Ruth Schaaf

TIME: Evening, 1865  
SCENE: A Negro home in Chicago  
CHARACTERS: Six males, three women  
COSTUMES: Period of Civil War  
AUDIENCE: Universal

SYNOPSIS: A Negro family in Chicago finds out that Granny has \$500 in her possession. All the members of the family feel that she should turn the money over to them because they can make better use of it than she can. While they are planning what to do Granny is sleeping in the next room. The preacher comes and goes into Granny's room. He is in her confidence and, knowing this, the family listens behind the door. They learn that Granny is going to use the \$500 to buy President Lincoln a present because he has freed the slaves, lifted them up, and told them to "weep no more." The family begins to argue back and forth. Everybody agrees that Lincoln is the friend of the Negro people and that they love him. But they think it is foolish to buy him a present with the only money they have in the world since he is rich enough and does not need their money. Some friends come in. They are going to a party. They are gay, festive. Then out in the street the newsies begin to cry: LINCOLN ASSASSINATED! They hear the words with pity and tears. Granny comes out from the next room. She is too old and deaf to notice that anything has occurred. She tells her family triumphantly that she is going to buy the President a beautiful gold watch with all of the \$500 so that when he wants to know what time it is he will take it out of his pocket and hold it in his hand. The family is grieved and silent. "Yeah, Granny," they say. Then one of them suggests that it would be better to buy a beautiful bed of flowers with the money, for him to lie on. But the old woman is too deaf and remains happy in the knowledge that she is buying a present for President Lincoln.

PRODUCTION

NOTES: This is an easy play to stage. Good acting parts.



NO GREATER LOVE

A One Act Drama

By

Charles Hayes

TIME: 1842. Night.

SCENE: A public room in a roadhouse.

CHARACTERS: Nine men, one woman.

COSTUMES: Period

AUDIENCE: Adults.

SUMOPSIS: Heathcock, a slave, is being helped to escape via the underground railway by Calvin, DeWolf, Ogden, Eastman, and Eastman's daughter, Charlotte. Matson, the owner of the slave, is in close pursuit. Heathcock is disguised as a woman and poses as "Julia," Charlotte's maid. The party comes to a roadhouse kept by Grumps Morgan. Shortly before the party arrives, Morgan and Squint, an employee, are discussing a reward notice which has been distributed by Matson. When the party enters, Squint is sent to care for the horses; Morgan prepares dinner. After dinner wine is served, and Charlotte requests a glass for her servant "Julia." While pouring the wine, Morgan notices the size of "Julia's" hands, and comments on it. Apparently satisfied by Charlotte's explanation, Morgan goes back to the bar and holds a whispered conference with Squint. Squint goes out and rides away. Somewhat uneasy, the abolitionists go upstairs to bed. Squint returns from having notified Matson. A short time later, Matson, and two of his men, Jake and Bill, arrive. The abolitionists are routed out of bed. DeWolf denies that "Julia" and Heathcock are one, and, hoping to convince Matson, agrees to fight him a duel, should he be proven wrong. Matson makes the agreement, promising the rest of the party freedom, should a duel be fought and he or DeWolf fall. Then Matson strips the disguise from Heathcock. As Jake is counting paces for the duel, Heathcock makes a break for freedom, and is brought down by Jake and Matson. A second later DeWolf kills Matson. Jake and Bill depart with their dead chief.





## SLEEP MAKER

A Three Act Dramatic Biography  
of W. T. G. Morton, discover-  
er of the anaesthetic proper-  
ties of ether.

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: 1846 to 1863.

SCENE: Boston. Four sets, done in seven scenes.

CHARACTERS: Twenty-two men, four women.

COSTUMES: Period costumes.

AUDIENCE: Universal.

SYNOPSIS: W. T. G. Morton, a dentist of Boston, Mass., has discovered that ether will cause insensibility to pain during surgery and tries to convince the medical authorities of this fact. He is jeered and laughed at but finally his discovery is tried and succeeds. A certain Dr. Jackson, an official of the Medical Society, tries to get credit for having made the discovery, even though he was one of those who laughed at Morton. Through Jackson's influence Morton is discredited and driven into poverty. He loses his practice, is forced to pawn his belongings, and becomes almost a pauper. Congress tries to clarify the situation as to who is the real discoverer of ether, but Jackson does not allow Congress to recognize Morton. Morton is driven from his office, is stoned by children on the streets, and loses all his friends, with the exception of his wife, Dr. Bigelow and Eben Frost. Finally, however, Morton receives his recognition...too late. He is dead. Bigelow directs a tirade against the young doctor who would not take Morton to a hospital because he looked too poor to pay his bill. But now at last the "sleep maker" can sleep in peace.

### PRODUCTION

NOTES: Sets in this play may be done simply with not too much attention to details, though some of the scenes, especially the scene in surgery, should be done as realistically as possible. Some of the male parts may be doubled if necessary.



PIONEER WITH A KNIFE

A One Act Play

By

Joe Abrams

TIME: Afternoon, March 2, 1889.

SCENE: Dr. Fenger's office in County Hospital, Chicago.

SETS: One interior.

CHARACTERS: Four men, two women.

SYNOPSIS: Miss Caraway, superintendent of nurses in the County Hospital, tells Dr. Fenger, the head of the hospital, that Dr. J. B. Murphy has practised unethical medicine, by operating on a patient for a stomach ache. Dr. Stinson enters and confirms this accusation, saying that Murphy refused to take his advice. He demands that Murphy be barred from further medical practice. Stinson has brought to the office Mrs. Monahan and Jim Monahan, mother and brother of the patient. Jim, upon hearing that the operation is unnecessary, threatens to kill Murphy when he sees him. Just when the tide is turning very much against Murphy he enters. Dr. Fenger asks him to defend himself on the charges of operating on a stomach ache when castor oil was the indicated prescription. Dr. Murphy explains in dramatic fashion that young Monahan did not have a stomach ache but had instead a severe case of appendicitis. For proof he offers the removed appendix and shows that it was necessary to perform the operation and save the patient's life. He received the gratitude of those related to the patient and the congratulations of Fenger. This is the story of the first appendectomy ever performed in the history of surgery.











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